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Paris, April 20, 1955

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Participants: General DeGaulle  
T. C. Achilles

General DeGaulle received me this afternoon with apologies for the delay in acceding to my request to see him, explaining that it had taken him some time to recover from his second cataract operation. He appeared tired, old and discouraged, and spoke along the following lines:

France: After reminiscing briefly of the times I had known him in London in 1940-41, he said that the great days were gone, the present was not brilliant and the future dark. When I asked the reason for his pessimism, he replied "men, and particularly Frenchmen." When I referred to the economic progress France had made since the war, he said this was of little importance compared to the fact that France had made no political or moral recovery. To his mind, the trouble was that unless France could lead the world as a great power, the French were not interested in anything except their personal affairs. During the war and upon his return to France, he had done his utmost to inspire a feeling of greatness in the French. Most French had cheered him wildly but few had followed and even fewer had helped him. Today the people did their jobs without interest. The country was suffering from national lassitude, which he repeatedly attributed to the awareness that France was no longer great. He said that the same lassitude and feeling of decadence and decline was noticeable to a slightly lesser extent in Great Britain, to some extent in Germany and that there were even signs of it in Russia. To my question as to what was needed to bring about a moral renaissance, he replied that he had no idea but that even decadence could pass.

His Own Plans: While he at not time alluded specifically to these, in discussing the present plight of France he referred to his establishment of the Rassemblement as his "last effort". He also remarked that people could only save themselves. The implication was clear that, at least in his present mood - and that appeared deep, he has no present plans for future activity, political or otherwise.

European and Atlantic Integration: To my question as to whether the French might not find a moral renaissance as part of a larger unity, he expressed complete pessimism. He said that he had opposed EDC as under it France would have been completely submerged. He was not opposed to European

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confederation however far it might go provided the advantages of national independence were conserved. He thought the French might "submit" to some form of Atlantic unity but would have no interest in it since they could not lead it.

Paris Agreements: He said that he had not opposed the Agreements because he found them neither good nor bad. When I asked if he did not consider the latest Russian concessions on Austria a result of ratification, he admitted that this was probably correct.

Four-Power talks: He thought that the Russians were really seeking some form of modus vivendi with the West. He thought they were troubled by their difficulties with the satellite peoples, particularly the East German, Poles and Czechs, and that they were increasingly fearful of the Chinese. They certainly did not want war and would probably in the next few years make material concessions to the West with a view to obtaining at least a long breathing spell. He thought the Russians would seek a neutral belt including not merely Sweden, Finland, Germany, Austria, and Yugoslavia but perhaps also Denmark and Italy.

Contacts: I told him that my letter asking to see him had been written while I was in charge but that the Ambassador had now returned and would welcome an opportunity to call upon him. He said he would be glad to see the Ambassador or myself at any time but remarked unnecessarily that he never called at Embassies. He added somewhat ruefully that although he had seen a considerable amount of Caffery and Bruce during the war, he had never seen either of them as Ambassadors in Paris or any American Ambassador since then.

Vinogradov: He continued by saying the only Ambassador he had seen in a long time was Vinogradov, who had called upon him a few months ago to explore the possibilities of DeGaulle's opposing the Paris Agreements. He believed Vinogradov to be keenly intelligent and to have believed even then that the Paris Agreements would be ratified.